

Sinning in Secret

A concise explanation to the evils of sinning in secret
and the evils of publicising one's sin in public



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All praise is due to Allâh. We praise Him and seek His aid and forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allâh from the evil of our own selves and from the evil of our actions. Whomsoever Allâh guides, none can send astray and whoever Allâh sends astray, none can guide.

I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allâh alone, who has no partner. And I bear witness that Muhammad (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) is His slave and His Messenger. May Allâh send peace and blessings upon him, his family and his Companions until the Last Day.



The first part of this book has been lightly adapted from Dr. Muhammad bin Abd Al-Rahman Al-Arifi's studio presentation – May Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) bless him for his good works.

Introduction

The lives of our noble pious predecessors (our salaf) indeed hold many incidents relating to their Glorification of Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) and fearing Him wherever they were; in public and in secret. Ibn Mâjah reports a saheeh hadeeth in which Thawban (رضي الله عنهما) narrated that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: "On the Day of Judgement, the good deeds of some people will be as big as Tihamah's mounts, but Allâh will scatter them (i.e. make them worthless). Thawban then asked the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) to describe these people lest he be amongst them. The Companions were worried they could be amongst such a group of people. The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) replied that they would be like them (i.e. the Companions) as they would also worship Allâh at night as they did, but what would distinguish them would be that they commit sins in secret and act against Allâh's Orders when alone. These people may seem pious and good in the presence of others, but when alone, they would continue to sin secretly.

Performing Good Deeds in Secret

When it comes to our pious predecessors, they used to fear Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) and observe His Commands and Prohibitions and guard themselves against temptations. We cannot but marvel and be moved by their lives. How we long to have their awe and reverence for Allâh that led them to the loftiest of deeds!

There are indeed many interesting and unparalleled and inspiring narrations about them. Let us take the example of 'Umar (رضي الله عنهما), who was one of the most pious Companions and Khaleefah (caliph). He maintained a strong relation with Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) in open and secret and abided by Allâh's Will in times of ease and in times of hardship, so that Allâh would help him whenever he would ask for His help.

‘Umar once went outside of Madinah to check on the conditions of his people as was his habit. When he reached the outskirts of Madinah, he found a man who had pitched an old tent and was sitting in front of it. ‘Umar went to him and asked him who he was; the man replied he was a Bedouin from the desert. He said he was poor and came to Madinah to get some money from the Ameer al Mu’mineen (leader of the believers (i.e. the Khaleefah). ‘Umar then asked the man if he could recognise the Khaleefah (if he saw him) and the man replied in the negative. ‘Umar then heard a groaning of a woman inside of the tent, so he asked who she was. The Bedouin man replied that it was none of his business, however ‘Umar insisted on knowing who she was. He said the woman was his wife and that she was about to give birth and that he had no money or food and neither was there anyone to help and take care of his wife during delivery.

‘Umar asked the man to wait for him and he promptly left for his home. He knew how to please Allâh and sought Allâh’s reward in all that he did. He went home to his wife Umm Kulthum bint ‘Ali ibn Abi Tâlib (رضي الله عنهما) and asked her if she wanted to be rewarded by Allâh. She asked how could she attain this reward, so he told her about the woman who was about to give birth and needed help. He asked her to take the necessary things and he himself took some food and carried some firewood and a bowel and they both set off to the Bedouin’s tent. When they arrived at the destination, Umm Kulthum went to attend to the woman, while ‘Umar stayed with the man. Even at this point the man did not know ‘Umar’s identity. ‘Umar kindled the fire himself and took the bowel and started cooking some food. He did everything for the Bedouin; even during the kindling of the fire, the smoke was rising and covering his face.

While ‘Umar was busy preparing food and the man’s wife was delivering the baby, Umm Kulthum called out to ‘Umar with the words ‘O Ameer al Mu’mineen’, tell your companion that he has begotten a boy’. When the Bedouin came to know of ‘Umar’s identity, he was astounded and could not believe that his companion was the Khaleefah (all this while). He asked are you ‘Umar ibn al Khatâb? ‘Umar reassured him and asked him to sit besides him; he then brought the bowel of food and put it inside the tent and asked his wife to feed the Bedouin’s wife as she was hungry and ate nothing all night. Umm Kulthum helped the woman to eat and she also took some food out of the tent; ‘Umar took the food and put it in front of the Bedouin and asked him to eat as he knew he had not eaten anything either.

The man started to eat and ‘Umar called upon his wife and then urged the man to go and feed his wife. He asked him to come to Madinah on the following day and visit him so that he can give him a stipend.

This is but a little story of how ‘Umar (رضي الله عنهما) used to look for the likes of the Bedouin so that he could help them. He did not want to be questioned about them on the Day of Judgement. When he was appointed as the Khaleefah, ‘Umar cried; when asked why he cried, he replied ‘even if a mule stumbled in a place as far away as Iraq, I fear that Allâh will hold me accountable for not paving the road for it.’ This was the kind of accountability the Sahabah used to hold for themselves. Indeed their ways have been preserved as shining examples for us.

Let us now take an even better example than ‘Umar’s – from a Companion who was better than ‘Umar, namely Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنهما). ‘Umar reported an incident in which he related that Abu Bakr used to (regularly) go to the desert after the Fajr salâh, so he wondered where the Khaleefah had been going at such an early hour of the day. ‘Umar decided to follow Abu Bakr one morning and see what he was doing. Abu Bakr went to the desert as normal and entered a shabby tent while ‘Umar hid behind a rock to observe him. Abu

Bakr stayed in the tent for a short while and then came; after he made his way back to Madinah, ‘Umar came out from behind his hiding and went to see who lived in the tent. He found a lady with little children - He asked her about her condition and she told him that she was an ageing widow and was raising orphan children. He found out that the lady was also blind. ‘Umar then asked her about the man who visited them. She answered that she did not know his name but he visits them every day and cooks food for them and kneads the dough and bakes their bread, clean their house and wash their clothes. The lady added that he also milked their she-goat and then he would leave. ‘Umar asked her if she gave him any money for the work that he did; she replied she had nothing to give in return. ‘Umar then asked her about the length of time since he started to visit and the lady answered that she does not remember. ‘Umar understood that Abu Bakr had been doing this for a long time.

Afterwards ‘Umar left the lady and remarked ‘you have made it a difficult job for the Khaleefahs (who come) after you O Abu Bakr’. It is true that no Caliph compares to Abu Bakr; and he had secret deeds that were righteous (and incomparable) by which he wanted to please Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى). Tabarâni records a statement of Abdullah Ibn Abbâs (رضي الله عنهما) who said: “Abu Bakr... excelled all the Companions of Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in piety and righteousness, renunciation of worldly goods and reliance upon Allâh.”

Many Muslims today perform secret deeds that are unknown to anyone except Allâh. Az-Zubayr (رضي الله عنهما) once advised his companion and said: “If you can keep a secret good deed between Allâh and yourself, then do it.” [Musnad Ahmad]

It is therefore strongly recommended that one should try and keep good deeds as a secret. Whether the secret good deed is offering voluntary fasts, voluntary salâh or tahajjud or giving sadaqah (charity) or feeding the poor and the needy or looking after orphans or any other good deeds.

It is well known that ‘Umar (رضي الله عنهما) was always in competition with Abu Bakr in performing good deeds, yet when some of Abu Bakr’s private matters used to come to light, he would find himself far from achieving what Abu Bakr had achieved. Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنهما) was the swiftest of the Companions to rush to good deeds. ‘Umar ibn al Khatâb narrated: "Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) ordered us to give sadaqah (charity). It happened to coincide with some wealth I had just acquired and I said to myself: If I will ever surpass Abu Bakr, this is the day (opportunity) for me to surpass him. And so I came to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) with half of my wealth and he (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said to me: "What have you left for your family?" I said: The same amount. Then, Abu Bakr came with all of his wealth. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said to him: "What have you left for your family?" He said: " I have left them Allâh and His Messenger." I (‘Umar) then said: I will never surpass you in anything." [Abu Da’wûd; classed hasan]

The Messenger of Allâh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) once asked his Companions, "Who amongst you is fasting today?" Abu Bakr said, "I am." He asked, "Which of you has visited a sick person today?" Abu Bakr said, "I have." Then he asked, "Who has attended a funeral today?" Abu Bakr said, "I have." He asked, "Who has fed a poor person today?" Abu Bakr replied, "I have." [Saheeh al Bukhâri; see also Adab al-Mufrad] - Marwan, the transmitter of the hadeeth said, "I heard that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "These qualities are not brought together in one man on a single day but that he will enter the Garden." [Saheeh Muslim]

'Umar ibn al Khatâb was present when Allâh's Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) asked the above questions and he showed his astonishment that Abu Bakr managed to perform all these duties despite the fact that it was early in the morning at the time of Fajr! Remember also that Abu Bakr (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا) only spoke of his actions in response to the Prophet's question. Otherwise, he would have kept his good deeds secret, as was his nature.

Competing with one another to do good deeds, in secret and in open is not only acceptable but also encouraged within Islâm. The Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) exhorted people to be easy in the affairs of this world, but to race with one another towards the Hereafter (i.e. for Paradise).

A modern day example:

A relative of my parents moved his family to a South Asian country so that he could provide a better environment for raising his children. From an early age he instilled in them noble Islâmîc values of kindness and mercy and other virtuous character-building traits. He died in his 70's and left behind children who had reached adulthood.

A month after his burial, an old woman came to the family home and enquired about the whereabouts of the deceased (not knowing that he had died). After being told of his death, the woman became sad and dejected. When the children enquired who she was and why she was sad, she replied that for the past 5 years their father used to provide for her poor household on the outskirts of the town. He used to visit them every month and check on their condition and also give them some money which they were in need of. Now that he is no longer alive, she wept at the loss of a generous man and the loss of their monthly stipend.

The children were not surprised at the good deeds of their father as he always encouraged towards them. They were however, surprised that he kept such a good act secret from them for five years! They were moved by the incident and agreed that they would continue providing for the woman's family in the type of secret charity which their father had initiated.

This was an example where a father led by example. He simply did not tell others to perform charity, but he put this act into practise himself. This type of secret charity encouraged his family to continue this benevolent act and in turn nurture their own children upon it.

In a lengthy Hadeeth where the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) mentioned the seven persons who will be shaded by Allâh on the Day where there will be no shade except His, amongst them he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) mentioned: "a man who gives charity and conceals it so that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives." [Saheeh al Bukhâri and Muslim]

If these are the virtues of performing good deeds in secret, how evil and bankrupt is the matter when one performs bad deeds and sins in secret?

Committing Sins in Secret

Many Muslims today have secret deeds that are only known to Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ). Are these secret deeds good? No, it has become common for many people to commit sins secretly. Drinking alcohol, committing fornication and adultery, gambling or any of other major and minor sins are committed secretly. Some Muslims even travel abroad to have promiscuous relations; they fear to be seen by people but they do not fear to be seen by Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ)!

Do they not know that on the Day of Judgement, they will be questioned by Allâh and not the people? So why is it that they fear people and not the one who Created them? Do they hold people in higher esteem than Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ)? The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) warned us against such actions when he explained how, On the Day of Judgement, Allâh will be furious with those who did not fear to sin knowing that He Sees them; those who hid from people to commit sins.

In the famous Hadeeth of Jibra'eel (AS) recorded by Imâm Muslim in his Saheeh, we understand the meaning of Islâm, Imân and Ihasân. As for the latter, it is narrated that Ihsân is: "...to worship Allâh as though you see Him, and while you cannot see Him, know that He truly He sees you".

Therefore Ihsan entails worshipping (سبحانه و تعالیٰ) with the constant awareness that He is seeing us. This awareness will lead us to refrain from sin and feel shame and remorse every time we contemplate to sin, let alone carry it out!

Imâm Ahmad composed lines of poetry thus: "I fear Allâh will blame me for being too shameful to disobey Him while being keen on hiding my sins from the people." – Piety leads to reward from Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ); but how can piety be gained in public and private? This is achieved when one is patient and close to Allâh to the extent that it would stop him from sinning.

All of us have our whims that drive us to commit sins; and even abandon acts of worship, conduct usurious dealings or pursue one's desires and have illicit relationships. However, from performing such acts, who is the winner here? Surely the winner is the one who restrains himself! Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ) says: **But as for him who feared standing before his Lord, and restrained himself from impure evil desires, and lusts. Verily, Paradise will be his abode.** (An Nazi'ât: 40-41)

A poet once said: "Be patient with whatever affliction." The consequences of patience are noble and good; it can not be exaggerated as it leads you to prepare yourselves for death. It prepares you by allowing you to do good deeds. Upon your death, you will not hear your kith and kin calling you as you will have already departed from this world. They will prepare for you to be shrouded and will place you in the darkness of your grave. What words would describe your feelings while lying there unaware or while your body is being washed before burial; or indeed when you are gathered to be judged on the Day of Reckoning. You will have no plea bargains or any other help from the creation; neither will you have any excuse to defend yourself from your sins in the world before Allâh, the Lord of the Worlds.

Allâh's Words are the Most Sublime and the following will be said to the people who enter Paradise: **Salâmun 'Alaykum (peace be upon you) for that you persevered in patience! Excellent indeed is the final home!** (Ar Ra'd: 24)

These are the people who were patient in the world, but what were they patient with? People may be patient in face of severe affliction or a trial that they were tested with, but more notable is the patience that leads people to retrain themselves! For example, people around them drank alcohol or used drugs, yet they refrained from falling into this temptation. People around them indulged in usury, gambling and illicit sex, yet they refrained from falling into this temptation. People around them wasted time watching television and immoral series and channels, or surfing pornographic websites, yet they refrained from falling into these temptations.

This self-restraint is a kind of patience that is more rewarding because it is a clear choice which they made. They chose to reject the 'status quo' and the societal norms; they did not 'go with the flow' and allow themselves to be subdued by peer pressure etc. Thus such uncompromising behaviour will make you be amongst the patient.

What about those who fail to practise patience and self-restraint? Who are those who will be the dwellers of the Fire? **Those who did wrong, pursued the enjoyment of good things of (this worldly) life, and were Mujrimoon (criminals, disbelievers, sinners).** (Hûd: 116) – Indeed they will be those who had no patience.

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ) says: **...come not near to Al-Fawâhish (shameful sins, illegal sexual intercourse) whether committed openly or secretly...** (An'âm: 151)

Fawâhish applies to all acts whose abominable character is self-evident. In the Qur'an; all extra-marital sexual relationships, fornication, sodomy, nudity, false accusations against chaste people, taking as one's wife a woman who had been married to one's father, are specifically reckoned as 'shameful deeds' or fawâhishah. In the Hadeeth; theft, taking intoxicants and begging have been characterised as fawâhish, as have many other brazenly indecent acts. Man is required to abstain from them both openly and in secret.

The ayah did not simply say 'do not commit Fawâhish', rather it was far more strict in safeguarding a person's moral character by saying 'come not near to Al-Fawâhish' – i.e. Do not even tread a path that will (sooner or later) lead to Fawâhish - (see article entitled: 'Sadd al Dara'i' (preventing the means) by the same author).

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ) says: **So whatever you have been given is but a passing enjoyment for this worldly life, but that which is with Allâh (Paradise) is better and more lasting for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord (concerning all of their affairs).** (Ash Shûra: 36)

Immediately after this ayah, Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ) says: **And those who avoid the greater sins, and Al-Fawâhish...** (Ash Shûra: 37) – After which Allah mentions: **The recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof, but whoever forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allâh. Verily, He likes not the Zâlimûn (oppressors, polytheists, and wrong-doers, etc.)** (Ash Shûra: 37)

For those who avoid greater sins and the fawâhish, there is reward. For those who commit greater sins and the fawâhish, the recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof. This evil is primarily due to lack of patience and where man takes this life as his ultimate abode and wants everything here and now!

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) prohibited adultery in the world so that those who abstained from it would be rewarded with houris in Paradise. Allâh prohibited alcohol in the world so that those who abstained from it would be rewarded with wine in Paradise. Those who indulged in these major sins will have no such reward and their punishment will be severe if they do not repent. Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) says: **And those who, when they have committed Fahishah (illegal sexual intercourse) or wronged themselves with evil, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their sins; - and none can forgive sins but Allah - and do not persist in what (wrong) they have done, while they know.** (Aal Imrân: 135)

Men are ordered to lower their gaze and not to look except at their wives for halal fulfilment; and women are also to do the same with their husbands. By keeping themselves chaste within the bond of marriage, men and women will be rewarded by seeing Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) on the Day of Judgement. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) also said: "Whoever can guarantee (the chastity of) what is between his two jaw-bones and what is between his two legs (i.e. his tongue and his private parts), I guarantee Paradise for him." [Saheeh al Bukhâri, 8/481]

Those who go against the Divine Orders will have no such reward and the greatest deprivation for them will be not to see Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی). They wasted all their good deeds for the enjoyment in the life of this world as Allâh says: **...You received your good things in the life of the world, and you took your pleasure therein. Now this Day you shall be recompensed with a torment of humiliation, because you were arrogant in the land without a right, and because you used to rebel and disobey (Allâh).** (Al Ahqâf: 20)

The Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "Whoever wears silk in this world will not wear it in the Hereafter." [Saheeh al Bukhâri, 5832]

He (صلى الله عليه وسلم) also said: "Whoever drinks alcoholic drinks in the world and does not repent, will be deprived of it in the Hereafter." [Saheeh al Bukhâri, 7/481]

Although it is not wholly established to suggest that something is not permitted in this world on the basis that it is permitted in Paradise, by analogy however, it is accepted that whoever enjoys illicit pleasures of this world, no matter how big or small, may be deprived of such pleasures in the Hereafter.

We are in Need of Allâh, He is not in Need of Us

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) Exhorts and Prohibits; whether we follow His Commands or not, will not affect Him in the least in any way as He says: **... Allâh is Rich (Free of all wants), Owner of all Praise.** (Ibraheem: 8)

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) will never be affected if His slaves do not worship Him: **... And whoever is grateful, truly, his gratitude is for (the good of) his own self, and whoever is ungrateful, (he is ungrateful only for the loss of his own self). Certainly! My Lord is Rich (Free of all wants), Bountiful.** (An Naml: 40)

And He (سبحانه و تعالی) also says: **...and whoever gives thanks, he gives thanks for (the good of) his own self. And whoever is unthankful, then verily, Allâh is All-Rich (Free of all wants), Worthy of all praise.** (Luqmân 12)

Many of us commit sins, both major and minor, yet they (the sins) do not take away from Allâh as befits His Greatness and Majesty. As part of a lengthy Hadeeth Qudsi, Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) says: "...O My servants, you will not attain harming Me so as to harm Me, and you will not attain benefiting Me so as to benefit Me. O my servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to become as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My kingdom in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I have, any more than a needle decreases the sea if put into it..." [Saheeh Muslim]

The Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said regarding the number of angels in the seven heavens, 'There is no space in the seven heavens a foot length or a hand-span or a palm's width which does not have an angel standing, bowing and prostrating.' [At-Tabaree]

The Angels of the Ranks are in constant worship, they remain in such a state until the Day of Judgment. When the trumpet is blown, all these angels will look upwards towards Allâh and Glorify Him and proclaim they never gave Him the worship He is due! Do you not see what these angels will say? Despite being in worship from the time of creation until the Last Day, they will still consider their worship to be insignificant to what He (سبحانه و تعالى) is due.

If the angels recognise the insignificance of their worship to Allâh, what is stopping man to even begin to worship Him (سبحانه و تعالى): **To Him belongs whosoever is in the heavens and on earth. And those who are near Him (i.e. the angels) are not too proud to worship Him, nor are they weary (of His worship). This worship they perform out of complete devotion. They (i.e. the angels) glorify His Praises night and day, (and) they never slacken (to do so).** (Al Anbiya': 19-12)

The Messenger of Allâh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) used to say while prostrating himself: "O Lord, forgive me all my sins, small and great, first and last, open and secret." [Saheeh Muslim, 4/980] - Despite the fact that the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was ma'soom (infallible), he remained in constant supplication and invocation, seeking the forgiveness of Allâh.

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "I see that which you do not. The Heaven cries (on account of the heavy load of the angels prostrating) and is justified in doing so. There is not a space equal to four fingers in it but is occupied by angels who are prostrating before Allâh. By Allâh, if you could know what I know, you would laugh little and weep much; you would not enjoy your wives in beds, and would rush into streets and jungles in search of Allâh's refuge. [Tirmidhi, 406]

It is then amazing to see how Muslims, while being described as the "best 'Ummah ever raised for mankind", can stoop so low and casually disobey their Creator. This disobedience stems from their pride and impatience and wanton oblivion to Him, as He (سبحانه و تعالى) says: **And They made not a just estimate of Allâh such as is due to Him...** (Az Z'Umar : 67)

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) shows how disbelievers engross themselves in sins because they don't give Allâh His due esteem and reverence, nor fear Him as they should. The same applies to the wrong-doers amongst the Muslims; who know that Allâh is watching them, as He (سبحانه و تعالی) says: **This Our Record speaks about you with truth. Verily, We were recording what you used to do (i.e. Our angels used to record your deeds).** (Al Jâthiya: 29)

He also says: **Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private counsel? (Yes We do) and Our Messengers (appointed angels in charge of mankind) are by them, to record.** (Az Zukhruf: 80)

And Ibraheem (AS) said: **O our Lord! Certainly, You know what we conceal and what we reveal. Nothing on the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allâh.** (Ibraheem: 38)

Those who understand fully, the fact that Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) is watching them and that every aspect of their actions and words are recorded by the two angels; must give Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) His due esteem and refrain from sins. Allâh says about those will reach Hell fire: **...their hearing (ears) and their eyes, and their skins will testify against them as to what they used to do.** (Fussilat: 20)

And you have not been hiding against yourselves, lest your ears, and your eyes, and your skins testify against you, but you thought that Allâh knew not much of what you were doing. (Fussilat: 22)

Fear of Allâh and arrogance can never co exist as He (سبحانه و تعالی) says: **And when it is said to him, "Fear Allâh", he is led by arrogance to (more) crime. So enough for him is Hell, and worst indeed is that place to rest!** (Al Baqarah: 206)

If you Sin, than Repent from it and Keep it Secret!

If what we have discussed shows the evil of performing prohibited deeds in secret, how worse and bankrupt is the matter when one broadcasts his sins in public?

If you sin in secret, than seek forgiveness from Allâh (سبحانه و تعالی) and keep it secret, lest you also be responsible for influencing others to commit the same sin! It is heavy enough that you disregard the Orders of Allâh and do not feel any remorse in it, that you divulge your sin to others! Allâh says: **Verily, those who like that (the crime of) illegal sexual intercourse should be propagated among those who believe, they will have a painful torment in this world and in the Hereafter. And Allâh knows and you know not.** (An Nûr: 19)

The Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: "My entire nation is safe (may be forgiven), except al-Mujahirin (who commit sin openly and boast about them). Among the Mujaharah is that a man commits an (evil) act, and wakes up in the morning while Allâh has kept his (sin) a secret, he says: "O so- and-so! Last night I did this and that." He goes to sleep while Allâh has kept his (sin) a secret but he wakes up in the morning and uncovers what Allâh has kept a secret!" [Saheeh al Bukhâri]

He (سبحانه و تعالى) says: **And those who have earned evil deeds, the recompense of an evil deed is the like thereof, and humiliating disgrace will cover them (their faces). No defender will they have from Allâh. Their faces will be covered, as it were, with pieces from the darkness of night. They are dwellers of the Fire, they will abide therein forever.** (Yunus: 27)

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ood (رضي الله عنهما) narrated that a man came to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and said: O Messenger of Allâh! I have mingled with a woman in the far side of al-Madinah, and I fulfilled my desire short of actually having sexual intercourse with her. So, here am I, judge me according to what you decide. 'Umar Ibn al-Khatâb (رضي الله عنهما) then said: 'Allâh had kept your secret, why did you not keep your secret?' [Sharh Saheeh Muslim]

Today, there are incalculable avenues through which sins are propagated in society. One such way is the media that reports on the deeds of others; illicit acts and immorality under the name of journalism and 'public interest'. The methods used to highlight these crimes and problems of others, are in reality, helping to fan the same problems in society! Crimes that were previously unknown to people have become common offenses that present anomalies and deviancy in society! It is therefore an obligation for Muslims to avoid violating a Shari' principle (of publicising sinful behaviour) and avoid all ways that leads to greater evil within the 'Ummah as much as possible.

Yet the Mujahirin will not be safe from the punishment of Allâh as the Hadeeth above indicates. For they publicise the sins that Allâh had concealed for them. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) also said: 'The Believer will be brought near his Lord till his Lord covers him with His screen and makes him confess his sins. (Allâh will ask him), 'Do you know (that you did) 'such-and-such sin?' He will say twice, 'Yes, I do.' Then Allâh will say, 'I concealed it in the world and I forgive it for you today.' Then the record of his good deeds will be folded up. As for the others, or the disbelievers, it will be announced publicly before the witnesses: 'These are ones who lied against their Lord.' [Saheeh al Bukhâri, 207]

Lying against the Lord includes outright kufr of those who reject their Creator; it also includes justifying acts that are clearly prohibited by Islam. It is astoundingly shocking to hear so-called Muslims try to justify the drinking of alcohol; there are even organisations that claim to be Muslims yet they justify, promote and support Muslims' right to be homosexual.

As a wise man once said: "Sin as much as you have the capacity to bear its punishment." And we know that even the lightest of punishment in Hell-fire will be too great for any human to bear. The fire that we light in this world is only one seventieth of parts in intensity, which the fire of Hell has, the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "Your (kindled) fire is one of seventy parts of the (Hell) Fire." Someone asked, "O Allâh's Prophet this (ordinary) fire is sufficient (as punishment)." The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said; "The (Hell) Fire has 69 parts more than the ordinary (worldly) fire, each part is as hot as this (worldly) fire." [Saheeh al Bukhâri, 4/487]

We are unable to even bear the intensity of the worldly fire; a fire that softens even the most hardened of metals. What makes anyone imagine that they will be able to bear the fire of Hell with all its extreme and varying forms of punishment, even for a fraction of a second? In another narration, it is stated that Hell itself complained to Allâh about its own intensity; as Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنهما) narrated: "Hell complained to its Rabb (Allâh), saying "O my Rabb, some parts of me have consumed others (due to the intensity of the

heat)." So He allowed it (Hell) to exhale twice, once in the winter and once in the summer. That is why you find extreme heat (in the summer) and extreme cold (in the winter)". [Saheeh al Bukhâri]

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) continuously reminds us: **Leave (O mankind, all kinds of) sin, open and secret. Verily, those who commit sin will get due recompense for that which they used to commit.** (Al An'am: 120)

Some immoral and promiscuous evildoers speak of the kaba'ir (major sins) like zina with pride and boast of how they travelled to such and such a land and committed fornication or adultery with a number of women. Does their boasting imply that they regard zina to be permissible!? Indeed whoever regards zina as permissible is a kâfir.

Do not reveal your sins (whether major or minor), not even to your close ones such as your spouse or parents. Ask Allâh for the forgiveness for the sins you commit and also ask Allâh to help you not to return to the same in the future. Hide and do not reveal the sins of your Muslim brothers and sisters and even the non-Muslims, to others. It is sufficient a burden for you to sin in secret than to increase the burden by propagating it to others in society.

The Messenger of Allâh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "If the believer commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he repents, gives it up and seeks forgiveness, his heart is cleansed, but if he does more then (that spot) increases until it covers his heart. That is the rân (covering of sin) which Allâh mentioned in the Qur'an: **Nay! But on their hearts is the Rân (covering of sins and evil deeds) which they used to earn.** (Al Mutaaffifeen:14) – [Musnad Ahmad, 8792 and Tirmidhi, 3334; classed Hasan (see Saheeh al-Tirmidhi, 2654)]

Imâm Ibn al-Qayyim said: "...The one who commits sin in secret is doing something less (serious) than one who commits sin openly and broadcasts it. The one who keeps quiet about it commits a less (serious) sin than one who tells people about it. Such a one is far removed from the forgiveness of Allâh, as the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "All of my 'Ummah may be forgiven except those who commit sin openly..." [Ighâthat al Lahfân, 2/147]

The basic principle is that the Muslim should follow his sin with repentance and seeking Allâh's Forgiveness. He should regret what he has done and resolve never to go back to it. He should not follow it with boasting and speaking openly about it, thereby rendering his repentance futile. Unlike the Catholic religion, there is no concept of confessing to any people or a religious figurehead. Every aspect of a Muslim's worship is directed to Allâh alone. There are no middle-men in Islam as Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) says: And your Lord said: **Invoke Me, (ask Me for anything) I will respond to your (invocation).** (Ghâfir: 60)

Ibn Katheer stated in his Tafseer: Allah encourages His servants to call upon Him, and He guarantees to respond. Sufyan Ath-Thawri used to say: "O You Who love most those who ask of You, and O You Who hate most those who do not ask of You, and there is no one like that apart from You, O Lord." This was recorded by Ibn Abi Hatim. Similarly; the poet said: "Allah hates not to be asked, and the son of Adam hates to be asked." Qatadah said that Ka'b Al-Ahbar said, "This Ummah has been given three things which were not given to any nation before, only to Prophets. When Allah sent a Prophet, He said to him, 'You are a witness over your nation.' But you have been made witnesses over mankind; it was said to the Prophets individually, 'Allah has not laid upon you any hardship in religion,' but He said to this entire Ummah: (and [Allah] has not laid upon you in religion any hardship) (22:78) and it was said to the Prophets individually; 'Call upon Me, I will answer you,' but it was said to this Ummah, (Call upon Me, I will answer you)." [Recorded by Ibn Abi Hâtim]

Salvation lies through Repentance

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) says: **Race one with another in hastening towards Forgiveness from your Lord (Allâh), and towards Paradise...** (Hadeed: 21)

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "By the One in Whose Hand my soul is, were you not to commit sins, Allâh would replace you with a people who would commit sins and then seek forgiveness from Allâh; and Allâh would forgive them." [Saheeh Muslim]

This Hadeeth informs us that Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) has an incessant love for such people who are repent from their sins and seek pardon for their sins from Him. So much so that if such people cease to exist (who neither commit sins nor seek pardon from Him), He would create a people who would do so. It does not, however, mean that He likes sins or sinful people; rather it means is that He likes penitence and the penitents and loves to Pardon and Forgive. As He (سبحانه و تعالى) says: **Truly, Allâh loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves.** (Al Baqarah: 222)

Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) further says in the Noble Qur'an: **Allâh loves to forgive sins: And seek the Forgiveness of Allâh, certainly, Allâh is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.** (An Nisa': 106)

And whoever does evil or wrongs himself but afterwards seeks Allâh's Forgiveness, he will find Allâh Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Nisa':110)

But whosoever repents after his crime and does righteous good deeds (by obeying Allâh), then verily, Allâh will pardon him (accept his repentance). Verily, Allâh is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Al Ma'idah: 39)

From the core characteristics of the Muslim is that they do not despair of the Mercy and Forgiveness of Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) as He says: **...and never give up hope of Allâh's Mercy. Certainly no one despairs of Allâh's Mercy, except the people who disbelieve.** (Yusuf: 87)

These ayaat and Hadeeth show that it is natural for man to commit sins; as the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "Every son of Adam sins and the best of those who sin are those who repent." [Tirmidhi, 2499]

It also shows that Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) loves whenever a slave commits a sin and rushes to repent and beg for His Forgiveness. Imâm Ibn al-Qayyim said: "Repentance is one of the realities of the religion of Islâm. The one who repents is the one who Allâh loves. Repentance is that you abstain and abandon that which Allâh dislikes and return to that which Allâh loves. It is important that we never think that is too late for us to repent because this is an idea of the Shaytân to prevent you from repenting. Ibn Taymiyyah said: "Whoever repents to Allâh then this general repentance, by the will of Allâh, will result in a person being forgiven even if they don't remember what they did."

Imâm Ibn al-Qayyim also said regarding sin: "Sin may be more beneficial for a person, if it leads him to repent, than doing a lot of acts of worship. This is what is meant by the words of one of the salaf: 'A person may commit a sin and enter Paradise because of it, or he may do an act of worship and enter Hell because of it.' They asked: 'How is that?' He replied: 'He may commit a sin and continues to think about it, and when he stands or sits or walks he remembers his sin, so he feels ashamed and repents and seeks forgiveness and regrets it, so that will be the means of his salvation. And he may do a good deed and continue to think about it, and when he stands or sits or walks he remembers it and it fills him with self-admiration and pride, so it is

the cause of his doom. So the sin may be the factor that leads him to do acts of worship and good deeds and to change his attitude so that he fears Allâh and feels shy before Him and feels humiliated before Him, hanging his head in shame and weeping with regret, seeking his forgiveness of his Lord. Each of these effects is better for a person than an act of worship that makes him feel proud and show off and look down on people. Undoubtedly this sin is better before Allâh and is more likely to bring salvation than one who admires himself and looks down on others, and who thinks that he is doing Allâh a favour. Even if he says words that indicate something other than that, Allâh is the Witness over what is in his heart. Such a person may feel hatred towards people if they do not hold him in high esteem and humiliate themselves before him. If he were to examine himself honestly, he would see that clearly.” [Madârij al-Sâlikeen, 1/299]

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen said: “How often is it the case that one of us will be better after committing sin than he was before. In many instances a person errs and falls into sin, then he feels ashamed in his heart before Allâh and he turns to Him and repents to Him, so that he thinks of that sin all the time and continually regrets it and seeks forgiveness. But another person may think that he is obedient (towards Allâh) and that he is one of the people who obey and worship Him, so he starts to admire himself and does not turn to Allâh, which adversely affects his religious commitment. Allâh is Wise and may test a person with sin in order to set him straight, just as He may test a person with hunger in order to improve his health. Adam was only chosen after he had committed sin and repented thereafter.

As Allâh (سبحانه و تعالیٰ) says: Then his Lord chose him, and turned to him with forgiveness, and gave him guidance (20: 122) i.e. after he had sinned and repented, his Lord chose him and accepted his repentance and guided him. Look at those who stayed behind from the campaign of Tabûk – what happened to them? Undoubtedly their faith increased and they attained a higher status than they had before. Could the ayaat concerning them, which will be recited until the Day of Resurrection have been revealed if they had not done that then repented to Allâh?” [Sharh al-Mumtî’, 3/66]

Conditions for the Acceptance of Repentance

Imâm Nawawi said: “Scholars say that it is a duty to repent of every wrong action. If it is disobedience which occurs between a person and Allâh and does not involve the right of another human being, repentance has three preconditions. The first is that one divest himself of disobedience. The second is that he regrets doing it. The third is that he resolves not to ever return to it. If one of the three is lacking, then his repentance is not sound. If it involves to another human being, repentance has four preconditions: these three and that he discharges his duty to the other person...”

The conditions can be divided as follows:

- 1. You should give up the sin** – This giving up of the sin should be for the sake Allâh alone, and not for any other reason.
- 2. You should regret having done it** – Remaining genuinely remorseful and regretful of his sin, as true repentance does not allow for taking pleasure from past sins. Feeling of remorse over what has been committed before is a condition; to this affect the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "Remorse is repentance." [Sunan Bayhaqi]

3. You should resolve never to go back to it – Remaining fearful of Allâh's Anger and sincerely praying for forgiveness, as true repentance does not allow for desiring to repeat the sin.

4. You should compensate those who have been wronged and/or obtain their forgiveness it – This condition needs further explanation. Repentance in the sense of regretting what one has done and resolving not to do it again is not sufficient to waive the rights that are owed to other people. For example, whoever has stolen another person's wealth, or seized it by force, or has wronged him in any other way, will not have finished with the matter by simply regretting it, giving up the sin and resolving not to do it again. Rather he has to restore those rights. This is a principle on which the fuqaha' (jurists) are unanimously agreed (have an ijma'). [See appendix one - page 16]

A fifth condition can also be added so that the one who repents can begin to take tangible steps to put his conviction into practise – It is to increase good deeds while decreasing bad deeds; along with developing humility and servitude to Allâh that will allow good deeds to be performed. This is highlighted in the Hadeeth of Abu Dharr (رضي الله عنهما) who narrated that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: "Fear God wherever you may be. Let an evil deed (be) followed by a good deed so that it will blot it out; and behave well towards the people." [Ahmad, Tirmidhi]

Muslims must race towards repentance and not delay it; Allah says: **Race one with another in hastening towards Forgiveness from your Lord (Allâh), and towards Paradise...** (Hadeed: 21)

Repenting in advance of a calamity, illness or death allows a person to fulfill conditions for the acceptance of repentance. Muslims should develop a healthy balance between fear and hope of Allâh. A true believer is afraid of Allâh's displeasure when he sins, and hopes for Allâh's Mercy when he repents. Allâh says about the Prophets: **..and they used to call on Us with hope and fear, and used to humble themselves before Us.** (Al Anbiya': 90)

The ephemeral successes of the world are indeed cosmetic, finite and last for short time, whereas the Qur'ân describes success that is real and which brings an infinite reward in the hereafter for all eternity. This is the success which every Muslim is in need of.

May Allâh (سبحانه و تعالى) Help us all to hold Him in His esteem and make us fear Him and to repent from sin and observe His Guidance in public and in private.

And indeed only Allâh's Help is sought in correcting our affairs and guiding us to success.

Disclaimer: The English translation of the meanings of the Qur'ân is taken from 'The Noble Qur'ân' by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan.

Please note that you can not and should not use non-Arabic translations of the Qur'ân and the Hadeeth as a replacement or substitute for the original Arabic. Gross misunderstandings usually arise from lack of language skills as well as knowledge of history and context from amongst other things.

Appendix One

With regards to the fourth condition of repentance -: **You should compensate those who have been wronged and/or obtain their forgiveness it.**

Righteous deeds do not expiate transgressions against the rights of others. Righteous deeds such as prayer, fasting, Hajj etc only expiate for minor sins, according to the majority of scholars, and they only expiate for transgressions against the rights of Allaah.

With regard to sins that have to do with the rights of other people, they can only be expiated by repenting from them. One of the conditions of repenting from them is restoring the rights of those who have been wronged. Even martyrdom will not expiate for what he owed to others. ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The martyr will be forgiven for all his sins except debt.” [Saheeh Muslim, 1886]

Imâm Nawawi said in Sharh Muslim: “The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) “except debt” draw attention to all rights owed to other people. Jihad, martyrdom and other righteous deeds do not expiate for transgressions against the rights of other people, rather they only expiate for transgressions against the rights of Allaah.”

Ibn Muflih said: “Martyrdom expiates for everything except debt. Our Shaykh (i.e. Shaykhul Islâm Ibn Taymiyyah) said: and except sins against other people such as murder and oppression.” [Al-Furoo’, 6/193]

Repentance in the sense of regretting what one has done and resolving not to do it again is not sufficient to waive the rights that are owed to other people. Whoever has stolen another person’s wealth, or seized it by force, or has wronged him in any other way, will not have finished with the matter by simply regretting it, giving up the sin and resolving not to do it again. Rather he has to restore those rights. This is a principle on which the fuqaha’ are unanimously agreed. See Al-Mawsoo’ah al-Fiqhiyyah, 14/129]

This has to do with material possessions, such as wealth that has been taken by force or by deceit. With regard to intangible rights such as in cases of slander and backbiting, if the person who has been wronged knows about it, then it is essential to apologize to him and ask for his forgiveness. If he did not know, then he should not be told; rather the one who wronged him should pray for him and pray for forgiveness for him, because telling him may upset him and create enmity and hatred between the two.

Shaykhul Islâm Ibn Taymiyyah said: “According to the saheeh hadeeth: “Whoever has wronged his brother with regard to his blood, his wealth or his honour, let him come and set matters straight before there comes a Day on which there will be no dirhams and no dinars, only good deeds and bad deeds, and if he has good deeds (they will be taken and given to the one whom he wronged), otherwise some of the bad deeds of the one whom he wronged will be taken and added to his burden, then he will be thrown into the Fire.” This has to do with cases where the one who was wronged was aware of it; but if he was gossiped about or slandered and he does not know, then it was said that one of the conditions of repentance is telling him, or it was said that this is not essential, which is the view of the majority; both views were narrated from Ahmad, but his view on such matters is that one should do good deeds for the one who was wronged, such as praying for him, praying for forgiveness for him and doing good deeds to be given to him, to take the place of that backbiting and slander. Al-Hasan al-Basri said: The expiation for gossip is to pray for forgiveness for the person about whom you gossiped.” [Majmoo’ al-Fatâwa, 18/189]